



STATE OF WASHINGTON
PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR STANDARDS BOARD

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PESB Establishes Requirements for Basic Skills Test for Prospective Teachers

Would-be teachers in Washington state will have to demonstrate mastery of basic academic skills by passing a standardized test for admission to teacher preparation programs beginning September 2002. The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), charged with determining the requirements for the test and the level of difficulty, released today a formal request seeking bids from publishers for a test in reading, mathematics, and writing.

"All 22 of our state's teacher preparation programs currently have basic skills requirements for admission to their programs," said Tom Charouhas, PESB Chair and science/technology teacher in Lake Washington School District, "but these requirements vary considerably. Our mission as a board is to maintain educator quality in the state. Our current work is developing a uniform way to measure basic skills competency for those teachers beginning their preparation for the classroom."

"PESB is moving with deliberate speed," said executive director Jennifer Wallace, "to act on directives from the 2000 State Legislature creating the board of K-12 and higher education professionals."

PESB is charged with responsibility for recommending policies related to recruitment, training, retention, and evaluation of educators. Among items in a work plan identified by the Legislature was the development of two tests for prospective teachers: a basic skills test that higher education institutions would use in common for admissions to teacher preparation programs, and a content test in the subject area the candidate is seeking certification to teach, such as secondary math or English. Teachers moving into Washington to accept positions within the state would also be required to pass the basic skills test.

"This board includes some of our state's finest educators," said Wallace, "and they understand well what it takes to be a good teacher. They are in the best position to determine what an appropriate test would be."

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Washington joins 45 other states in requiring teachers to pass a basic skills test prior to certification.

The law gives the PESB authority to establish exceptions to this requirement, for example for individuals from other states who have demonstrated proficiency through a similar basic skills test assessment. The PESB may permit other exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

"PESB will reach out to those with a vested interest in the selection process," said David Anderson, the Board's Assessment Director, who described a work plan which includes review by interested stakeholders of the test proposals received. The board expects to announce the successful bid by September, and begin a pilot of the test by November. Work on developing the specifications for content area tests will lead to a similar RFP in September.

PESB has already completed the first assignment given to the 19 appointees last September: recommendations for alternate routes to teacher certification, particularly for those paraprofessionals who are already working in the classroom and for college graduates with degrees and work experience in tough-to-staff areas such as science and math. Governor Gary Locke and Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson used the recommendations to draft legislation which was signed into law on May 3rd.

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